

Department of Computer Science Ph.D. Qualifying Examination Policy

- **The written qualifying examination tests for breadth.**
- **The written Ph.D. qualifying exam will be based on material covered in the 5 core classes that the Ph.D. student must complete to satisfy the Ph.D. core requirement (i.e., one of our MS-CS or MS-CS-SE cores).**
- **It will consist of five parts corresponding to the 5 core areas; each part will be 90-150 minutes.**
- **Exams will be scheduled shortly after final exams for the corresponding core classes. All 5 parts must be completed within 1-3 long semesters; it is highly recommended that exams are taken during the same semester that the student is taking the corresponding core class. At least one exam must be taken each long semester until the student completes the qualifying exam.**
- **The Ph.D. committee in consultation with faculty will define "exam topics" for each core class. These become the materials the students will be examined on.**
- **Possible outcomes for each part of the exam are: pass, marginal performance, fail. A pass implies that the student will not be re-tested in that part in the future; a fail means that the student should retake the exam; a marginal performance implies that a decision will be made after the results in the other 4 parts are available.**
- **Possible outcomes of the overall qualifying exam are: Pass, conditional pass (with recommendation for some corrective action - e.g., take a specific class), conditional fail (student gets a second chance to take exam - all or parts), fail (student is dropped from PhD program). A conditional pass can not require a second qualifier (or parts of) - that is reserved for the conditional fail. A conditional pass will be changed to a pass, conditional fail, or fail decision once the requirements specified in the corrective action can be evaluated. The possible outcomes for a student taking the exam for the second time are: pass, pass with conditions, fail.**
- **Part Time Students have up to 5 long semesters to complete the exams.**

Additional Rules

- **A "Pass" in the overall Qualifying exam requires 4 "Pass" and one "Marginal" (or better) grades in the individual core class exams.**
- **Students that are on track for an overall "Pass" should continue taking exams on the remaining core classes.**
- **Students that are not on track for an overall "Pass" (i.e., have "Fail" and/or multiple "Marginal" grades in the individual class exams) are in the "Conditional Fail" category; they need to take exams in the remaining core classes and retake exams that were not passed; each exam may be repeated only once – the second grade overwrites the first.**

- A student remains in the “conditional fail” category until either (a) the requirements for an overall “Pass” are met; then the student gets an overall “Pass”, or (b) it is impossible to meet the requirements for an overall “Pass” (e.g. a second “Fail” grade in an individual class exam, etc.); then the student receives an overall “Fail” (i.e. the student is dropped from the Ph.D. Program).
- Students that need to retake an exam must do so within a year of the original exam (but must take at least one exam each long semester). Students that need to retake one or more exams will be allowed one additional long semester to complete all exams.

Note: The three semester (or 5 for part-time students) limit for taking the 5 exams still applies. If a student is allowed an additional semester to retake exams, it is possible to shift a first-time exam to the additional semester by petition to the PhD committee. However, since all exams must be completed by the end of the additional semester, the student will not have a “second” chance at such an exam. Because of the serious consequences, a petition to shift “first-time” exam(s) into an additional semester requires a signed statement by the student and his/her advisor that the implications of a shift are understood.

- Students that fail to appear for an exam they sign-up for and/or do not take exams as specified by the policies will receive a grade of “Fail” for that exam (or some exam(s) if it is not clear which exam(s) was missed).
- Students that Fail the overall QE will be allowed to register for one additional long semester (and Summer if included). They can not take QE exams in CS, defend proposals, dissertations, etc. during that semester (or during an included Summer semester).

Track/Major Changes within the CS Department:

- The QE policy applies uniformly to all the doctoral degrees offered by the CS department (PhD-CS and PhD-SE at present). A change in the MS-track/major (which is the core requirement in the PhD degree plan and the base for the Qualifying exams) while in the midst of taking qualifying exams is not encouraged as it may result in the student taking more than 5 exams. Note that passing the QE as a whole does not restrict the student in the choice of advisor/topic when it comes to the PhD dissertation.
- In case of a track/major change, the student must be in good standing with respect to the QEs taken in the previous track (i.e., “passing”); the student needs to take all the required exams for the new track/major. An overall “Pass” requires “Pass” grades in at least 2/3 of the exams and “Marginal” grades in the rest. (Any exam in which the student received a “Fail” grade must be repeated; if a total of 6-8 distinct exams are taken, then 4 “Pass” and 2 “Marginal” or better result in an overall “Pass”; if 9-11

exams are taken, then 6 "Pass" and 3 "Marginal" or better is the overall "Pass" requirement).

Rules for MS Students

MS students that have been admitted to the Ph.D. program for the next semester (e.g. MS students in Fall 2004 that get admission to Ph.D. for Spring 2005) will be allowed to take qualifying exams during the current semester (e.g. in December 2004). If they elect to do so, they need to complete the qualifiers in 3 (5 for part-time) long semesters; all other rules apply as well. The effect of a "Fail" on the overall qualifying exam for MS students is that they will not be admitted to the PhD program (can apply but the QE grades will be part of the file considered by the Admissions Committee).

To allow for special cases, a tenure-track faculty member can submit a written petition to the Ph.D. committee to request that an MS student be allowed to take qualifying exams. The student will be allowed to take qualifying exams (again under the same rules that apply to PhD students) if the petition is approved by the PhD committee.

Additional Information/Guidelines

See an advisor to do a degree plan during your first semester and update it as needed. Members of the Ph.D. Committee act as advisors initially; should have a dissertation advisor by the end of your first year or by the time you complete the Qualifying exams.

Ph.D. Committee – current membership

K. Zhang, Chair
Gopal Gupta
Simeon Ntafos
Yang Liu
G. Dattatreya
Haim Schweitzer
Eric Wong

Check your UTD email regularly for announcements. Your Qualifying Exam grades will appear on WebCT, once grading, etc. has been done. The faculty tries its best to make decisions before the add/drop of the following long semester goes past.